

Loose Lips Sink Ships, Loose Bullets Kill People

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As part of our scheduled deployment, our squadron was supposed to do split-site operations between a forward operating base (FOB) in Iraq and our carrier. This plan meant the entire squadron had to become pistol-qualified because we lived and worked within the FOB. The qualifications included a Navy online tutorial, an online test, and a pistol shoot.

I was checking my e-mail in the squadron's operations space when I noticed a holster lying on the floor. This being Iraq, the holster already was dusty, so I picked it up and put it on a desk. As I did, I saw a single bullet lying on the floor and immediately picked it up and took it to the operations duty officer (ODO), who had a list of all the crew. We printed out a copy of that list and told everyone to inventory their ammo.

The bullet was given to the maintenance material control officer (MMCO), who called maintenance control and had any maintainers who might have been in the space also to inventory their ammo. The ODO and I watched all the aircrewmembers inventory their bullets and checked them off the list. One jet was airborne, and we narrowed down the missing bullet as belonging to one of the crewmembers aboard that jet. Once it landed, we found who that crewman was and returned the bullet to him.

Twelve hours later, I was getting ready to go flying and walked into maintenance control to read the aircraft report and saw that everyone again was inventorying their bullets. This time, it turned out a maintainer had lost a bullet, but since everyone had gone through maintenance control, we all had to do another inventory.

Bullets and handguns are controlled items and rightfully so. People issued guns and ammo are responsible for their upkeep, as well as their inventory. If something is missing, charges could be brought up of dereliction of duty, loss of government property, and not being able to deploy to that base. Because of the limited manning that split-site operations cause, every Sailor is valuable, and losing a person to something like irresponsibility cannot be afforded. In short, the loss of a Sailor's ability to deploy to this base hurts the squadron. It also could have a trickle-down effect

and hurt the people being supported by the squadron's jets due to an increase in maintenance time.

Another consideration is that random bullets lying around don't contribute to a safe environment. We are all adults, so the chances of someone playing with a bullet are slim but still exist. Second, a person inadvertently stepping on one of the bullets could have set off the primer. Last, trash on this base is burned. If either of these bullets had been swept up without anyone noticing, it could have gone off in the trash pile, possibly killing or hurting a Marine.

Aside from poor attention to detail, another cause for the random bullets is the design of the holster. Once personnel enter their shop, they take off the guns and put them on a desk or in a locker. The constant lifting and swinging rubs against the clips and loosens the first bullet.

The fix to this problem simply is to pay attention to issued items. People putting on their guns after working on a jet should open the clip holsters and make sure the mark on the clip reads full. These guns are issued as a self-protection measure. If we're going to protect ourselves, as well as those around us, we need to follow the proper procedures for storage and upkeep. ■

Here's something you need to remember: OpNavInst 5530.13 (Department of the Navy Physical Security Instruction for Conventional Arms, Ammunition, and Explosives) clearly states in paragraph 0101(a), "Individuals issued or in possession of AA&E are responsible for its security." It is highly recommended that all commands review this instruction to evaluate their AA&E program for compliance in accordance with Appendix F.—Cdr. Al Dean, Explosives and Weapons Division Head, Naval Safety Center

Resources:

- <http://www.brooksidepress.org/Products/OperationalMedicine/DATA/operationalmed/Safety/WeaponsHandling.htm> [Weapons Handling]
- http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/bestpractices/other/downloads/Safety_Corner_weapons.pdf [Weapons Safety].

Navy photo by MCSN Derek R. Sanchez